

How Is Torrance Coping With Mental Illness -- The Nation's Number One Health Problem

(Editor's note: This is the first of a series of four articles on Mental Health. These articles will explore 1) the nature of mental health and mental illness; 2) the type of public help available to residents in the Torrance area (that is, how the San Pedro State Mental Health Clinic which covers this area functions); 3) problems and case histories which have been dealt with at the clinic; and 4) the present status and future outlook of the clinic.)

By RALPH R. GOMPERTZ
Managing Editor

Far too few Torrance residents are aware of the fact that there is a mental health clinic in the Harbor area.

Yet one-fifth of the individuals who avail themselves of that clinic's services are from Torrance.

The possibility that the problem of mental illness might strike close to home—even you and me—is far too real to be ignored.

The facts are stubborn and uncompromising. At the present rate, one out of every 12 children born each year will need to go to a mental hospital sometime during his life because of severe mental illness.

At least one in every 16 individuals is suffering from a mental or emotional disorder.

Every other hospital bed contains a mental patient. Faced with such a possibility, what would you do? How would you act?

You might turn for help to your minister. Perhaps you will be aided by an understanding family physician. You might confide in a close and trusted friend or rela-

and the poor, the young and the old, the factory worker, farmer, office worker, executive.

There isn't a person who can safely say, "I am immune. It can't happen to me."

MAGIC FORMULA?

Is there a magic formula then, which will prevent mental illness and which will guarantee happiness?

Dr. Conrad voiced a decisive "no" to this question. But there are certain guides to follow.

One way of describing mental health is to describe mentally healthy people, he indicated, referring to a pamphlet published by the National Association for Mental Health and distributed by the Harbor District Mental Health Service ("Mental Health is . . . 1, 2, 3").

No one characteristic by itself can be taken as evidence of good mental health, nor the lack of any one as evidence of mental illness, the pamphlet points out. Furthermore, no one has all the traits of good mental health all the time.

But these are some of the characteristics of people with good mental health:

ONE—They feel comfortable about themselves:

They are not bowled over by their own emotions —by their fears, anger, love, jealousy, guilt or worries.

They can take life's disappointments in their stride. They have a tolerant, easy-going attitude towards themselves as well as others; they can laugh at themselves.

They neither under-estimate nor over-estimate their abilities.

They can accept their own shortcomings. They have self-respect.

They feel able to deal with most situations that come their way.

They get satisfaction from the simple, every-day pleasures.

TWO—They feel right about other people:

They are able to give love and to consider the interests of others.

They have personal relationships that are satisfying and lasting.

They expect to like and trust others, and take it for granted that others will like and trust them.

They respect the many differences they find in people.

They do not push people around, nor do they allow themselves to be pushed around.

They can feel they are part of a group.

They feel a sense of responsibility to their neighbors and fellow men.

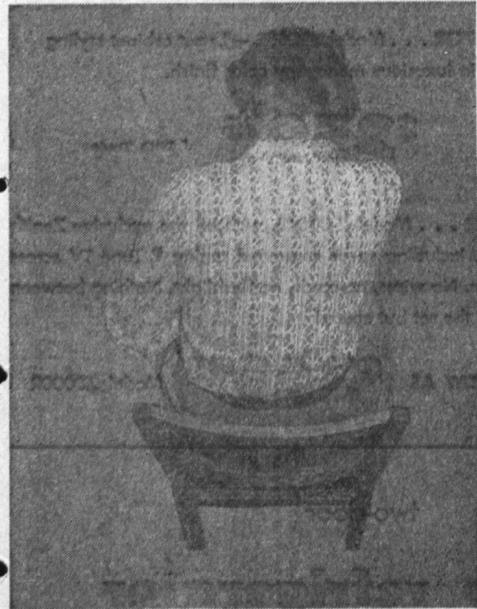
THREE—They are able to meet the demands of life:

They do something about their problems as they arise.

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tive, thus finding your way back to a healthy, balanced outlook. Or, you will seek the professional services of private psychologists or psychiatrists.

But what about those who, for one reason or another, find these paths unacceptable?

And, what of those who are anxious to be helped but cannot afford private treatment?

Their answer is the San Pedro State Mental Health Clinic which serves Torrance, Lomita, Harbor City, Carson, as well as the South Bay and Harbor areas.

The clinic is three years old. It is located at 731 South Beacon st., San Pedro (TE. 2-6464). Until July of this year, it was open only one day a week. It is now open full-time.

Is there a definition of mental health? When is a person said to be mentally ill? What is the formula for staying mentally healthy, if any? What causes mental illness? What can the clinic do and how much does it cost?

NUMBER ONE HEALTH PROBLEM

"Mental illness is our number one health problem," Dr. Simon J. Conrad, chief psychiatrist and director of the San Pedro State Mental Health clinic as well as director of the Los Angeles State Mental Hygiene clinic, declared this week.

What constitutes mental health? What is mental illness?

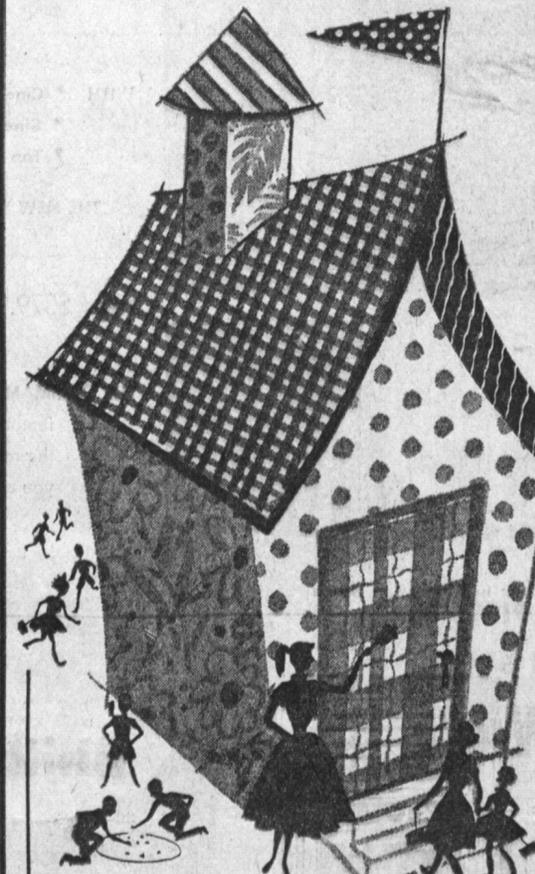
"There are dozens of definitions of mental health," he said, when asked to point out the difference between a person who is mentally healthy and one who is mentally ill. "Let us just say generally that we live in a neurotic civilization. Everyone has problems. But when the problems begin to interfere with our functioning, then the neurotic individual becomes a neurotic patient."

Dr. Conrad went on to emphasize that a definite distinction is made between the emotionally disturbed individual and one who is mentally ill.

An emotionally disturbed individual is referred to as a neurotic individual. Such persons are unable to function adequately because of emotional illness, but they still face reality.

However, when an individual finds it impossible to cope with reality and begins to retreat from life and society, he becomes a psychotic, or mentally ill.

Mental illness plays no favorites. It affects the rich



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